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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 0255  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 UNVIE VIENNA 000226

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [IR](#) [PAK](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: UNODC/IRAN: SLOWLY MOVING FORWARD ON REGIONAL  
COOPERATION

REF: A. UNVIE VIENNA 00117

[B](#). UNVIE VIENNA 00173

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Geoffrey Pyatt for reasons 1.4 (c) and  
(e)

[1](#). (C) Summary. UNODC Head of the Europe and Central/West Asia Office Roberto Arbitrio on May 13 briefed Msnoffs on his trip the prior week to Afghanistan and Iran. Although the trip did not yield much substantive progress, it appears that joint counternarcotics cooperation under the Triangular Initiative continues to move forward, and Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are still working to do a second joint counternarcotics operation by late June. Arbitrio speculated that despite U.S. movement toward engagement, Iran may not be able or willing to respond until fall or later and certainly will not take any steps before the presidential elections next month. Already, Iran has ended its willingness to have substantive dialogue on new counternarcotics initiatives with UNODC. End Summary.

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UNODC Meetings Make Little Progress  
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[2](#). (C) UNODC Head of the Europe and Central/West Asia Office Roberto Arbitrio on May 13 told Msnoffs that the prior week's meeting in Kabul, which he attended with UNODC Executive Director Antonio Costa, was the second meeting of the "Tripartite Initiative" involving Iran, Afghanistan, and the UN. Arbitrio noted that the Tripartite Initiative was formed at the behest of Iran about a year ago and the May meeting was also held at Tehran's initiative. Arbitrio described this forum as part of Iran's increased interest in being actively engaged with Afghanistan and getting recognition for doing so. He noted that Iran probably wanted to "position itself" on Afghanistan and increase its leverage, but felt that a UN umbrella would make its outreach more successful.

[3](#). (C) Overall, Arbitrio dubbed the meeting "not particularly interesting," though Iran promised bilateral assistance to Afghanistan, including a training course for Afghan police. (Comment: There is no indication that this is different from the prior Iranian proposal of training for Afghan police. End Comment.) Arbitrio noted that Iran would like to offer the course at its new training center in Iran which it sees as state of the art. This complex also is where the Triangular Initiative's Joint Planning Cell is hosted.

[4](#). (C) As part of this trip, Arbitrio and Costa also met with the governor of Herat and an Italian PRT there and visited a counternarcotics checkpoint near Herat where they met the commander of Afghanistan's border patrol and U.S. advisors to Afghanistan's forces (septel).

15. (C) Although Costa left the region through Iran, he held no meetings there. Arbitrio remained in Iran to introduce his colleague Antonino de Leo to the Iranian interlocutors he worked with during his recent four and a half year post in Tehran. (Note: De Leo is on a three-month TDY to run the UNODC office in Tehran and has applied with UNODC to remain in Iran as the head of UNODC's Iran programs there. End Note.) None of these meetings were substantive, Arbitrio said, because Iran's policies are frozen until after the presidential elections next month, and we probably will not see movement until the September to December time frame. Nevertheless, he speculated that Iran probably would not "spoil" an opportunity for engagement with the U.S. before then if in its interests, though it probably cannot act or change its policy until at least late fall. We could see additional signals in the interim, such as the release of Saberi, but a signal is different than a change in policy. Most members of the Iranian establishment are acting with extreme caution until a new administration is in place, but the Iranian leadership probably already has some ideas and new policies that are on the shelf until after the election. Arbitrio noted that he makes clear to his Iranian interlocutors that they currently have an opportunity that they should take advantage of if they want to re-integrate into the international community and that this door will not be open forever. His sense is that Iran knows that there is an "urgency" to discuss "certain issues," so they will be reluctant to truly let these opportunities pass by.

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Moving Forward on Regional Programs  
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16. (C) The Iranian delegation to the Tripartite Initiative meetings in Kabul--which included Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan Maleki, Iranian Deputy Secretary General of Iran's Drug Control Headquarters Taheri, and head of Iran's Anti-Narcotics Police Hossein-Abadi--also planned to discuss with Afghan officials future operations under the Triangular Initiative, though UNODC did not take part in these meetings. Afghanistan still has not completed its own "lessons learned" exercise evaluating the March 8 joint counternarcotics operation (ref A), but Arbitrio hopes that a review exercise with Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, as well as a second joint operation can take place before the third ministerial meeting of the Triangular Initiative, which is tentatively set for June 21-24 in Islamabad (Pakistan is still waiting for a response from Iran on the dates). The Pakistani Anti-Narcotics Forces have developed an operational plan for the second joint operation and plan to take the lead. A workshop on communications requirements for the Triangular Initiative is also being planned because of the inability for the three national forces to communicate during the March operation. Pakistan has passed out a questionnaire to all three states, but Arbitrio suspects that Iran is unlikely to participate given its sensitivities about its radio communications equipment. Tehran's suspicions of other states' interference in its communications equipment also will prevent Iran from accepting or using any communications equipment not manufactured in Iran in Arbitrio's opinion. In addition, by the end of the month, Afghanistan plans to send a full-time drug liaison officer to the Joint Planning Cell for the first time, which Arbitrio sees as an important step forward.

17. (C) In addition, UNODC currently is developing a regional program proposal from the Rainbow Strategy to present at the June G8 meeting in Trieste. UNODC plans to create a regional coordination unit based in Vienna to backstop and support regional integration as its programs move more in that direction. Arbitrio expects that the coordination unit will be led by a steering committee that will create action plans for regional programs.

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Iranian/UNODC Priorities for Drug Demand Reduction  
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18. (C) Arbitrio noted that UNODC's priorities for drug demand reduction programs as reflected in the presentation its officials gave in late April (ref B) are reflective of Iran's priorities as well, but he would focus on three issues for funding in this category: prevention, advocacy, and treatment. He argued that prevention and advocacy programs are important because they are essentially civil society programs and help to support NGOs and keep them engaged in Iran. In general, Iran is still not interested in receiving bilateral assistance, but prefers to work through UNODC.

19. (C) Arbitrio also reiterated that the language we use when working with Iran on counternarcotics issues is important to engagement. For example, the UNODC always speaks of "partnership" with Iran, rather than "assistance" to Iran when speaking to Iranian officials. Discussion of assistance to Iran always shuts down Iran's willingness to engage. However, Iran is able to be in give and receive modes on counterdrug issues and sees prestige in both hosting regional workshops, since Iran is seen as the center for South-South cooperation, and going to international top-level drug control programs for "exchanges" through which Iran would learn from other experts without admitting to being in a lesser contributing role. Iran is very interested in both kinds of exchange.

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